

Vocation, Not just Employment
Benedictine Institute Lectures
December 6, 2017

Chick Hardy:

Good morning, hello. If I could get your attention please. Thank you. I'd like to welcome you here today on behalf of the Benedictine Institute. I'm Chick Hardy and we have another special speaker today. Father Jonathan Licari and when I asked him for his information so I could introduce him he asked if he could introduce himself. ***audience laughter***
So I don't know.

Jonathan Licari:

It's safer if I do that ***audience laughter***

Chick Hardy:

I don't know if he doesn't trust me or just the fact that, besides his, besides God and his mother know more about him than Jonathan does, um he's the next in line so I will turn it over to him. But I overheard someone tell him just a few minutes ago that they've been waiting for 65 years to hear someone talk on this topic so. So no pressure at all okay? And with that I will turn it over to Father Jonathan. ***audience applause***

Jonathan Licari:

When the person stopped at the table and made that comment, I am now revising everything that I wanted to say in my head. ***audience laughter***

But just as a brief introduction, I'm Johnathan Licari. I joined the monastery and took first vows in 1982. I am from the Iron Range northeastern Minnesota, about 230 miles north-east and a tad west from here. I am the youngest in my family. There were I have two older brothers. I was originally ordained for the Diocese of Duluth and after five years of being in the diocese I decided I'm going to come back to where I studied theology. And I think one way to explain it is being a part of St. John's in the SOT seminary at that time, I don't think I ever envisioned being away from St. John's. Somehow the place becomes a part of one's person. I don't know if I'd call it genetic. It's in the blood, it's in the water, it's in whatever you're drinking when you're drinking. ***audience laughter*** But somehow the place captures a person and we come back or we stay.

So that's that. I've worked in the monastery administration, I did 18 years of parish work, five in the Diocese of Duluth, 13 for the monastery, I've taught in the university, I worked for the

diocese. and that's a nice way, and currently I work at the prep school, and that's a nice way to say that I can't hold a job. ***audience laughter*** So I keep moving around.

I wanted to welcome you on this St. Nicholas Day to the talk about vocation, not just employment. It might be safe to say that we all came here for the free lunch. and as one of the monks told me last night if you don't show up for the talk then you get a bill in the mail and you have to pay for the lunch. So we're always watching budgets a favorite topic. None of us understand what budgets are about. But I'd like to at least in the conversation this afternoon, and I would like it to be conversational, along with some entertainment, talk about what it means when it we say vocation not just employment.

Well in order to do that we actually have to start with Genesis. And it all started, and some of the sisters from St. Benedict that are here heard part of this in the homily last Sunday, it started with an apple, a simple apple. Eve blamed the snake, Adam blamed Eve, and we haven't been able to get along ever since. ***audience laughter*** But there's something in what happened that we have to learn that Adam and Eve did not. They never asked God for forgiveness. They never admitted they made a mistake. All they did was blame and blame. And at that point we understand more clearly how difficult it is to be human. We have this capacity within ourselves, whether we like it or not, sometimes we get into trouble, sometimes we can be absolutely wonderful people, and it's like a little switch goes off and we can be real stinkers about how we treat each other, how we look at ourselves, how we walk through life.

And that's part of understanding vocation, part of understanding employment, certainly part of understanding how we work together whether we're at St. John's or anywhere else. So it's about being human and having a great sense of humor. Some of us can be so serious about ourselves that any criticism, any scowl that comes across and were offended and we run to our supervisor. Monks run to the abbot or to the prior and say if you just fixed so-and-so everything's going to be a lot better. I want you to fix Brother or Father so-and-so. Supervisors if you just fix the person I work with it'll be so much better. But what we forget what we forget is if we're complaining about someone and wanting them adjusted somehow so we're comfortable, we don't know if they went in before us ***audience laughter*** or if they're going to go in after us. And the same line will be delivered, if you just fix so-and-so things are going to be a lot better. It'll be much easier to work.

So starting with the apple let's come back to employment and vocation. Whether we're working here or anywhere else we have to understand and choose to understand, we don't have to do anything. But if we choose to understand that somehow our working together and understanding a context in which to put our work experience, our personal experience, our faith experience, into a package so that we can better appreciate and start from the base called respect. Without respect there's no other way to go but down. Why? Because every part of our life and our interaction with each other is based on a fundamental reality called respect. We can't say we love each other, we can't say that we love God, we can't say that we

have something to offer, if there's no respect in our person for the other person. It's a mutuality.

Employees and employers have a mutual relationship with each other. Monks or potential monks coming to the monastery, we have a mutuality with each other. We have something to share and something to give if it's going to work. If we don't share and are unwilling to give nothing happens. Oh something will happen. We're going to be frustrated. We're going to be angry. We're going to be critical. We're going to be negative. We won't even see the sun when it's up because we've painted such a dark picture and we have chosen not to be participants.

We have to choose to participate. Now not everyone, we all know this, not everyone's easy to get along with. None of us I don't think is born to get along with somebody else. We have to work at it. We have to be conscious of it. I don't know, work isn't the best word, conscious of making an effort to get along with people, and ourselves.

We can easily be down on ourselves. I'm not smart enough. I'm not tall enough. I am not making enough money. We can go through a laundry list and blame ourselves. Then we're back to the garden and the apple, the snake, Eve, and Adam. No let's work with what we got. everybody has a gift and everybody has something to offer. We have to choose to keep polishing the gift and making the offer.

Brings us back momentarily to the Rule of Saint Benedict. The very first word of the rule is Listen. Now you're listening or are you hearing. Right now during lunch, are you listening or are you just hearing? Hearing can be a passive activity. Listening is active. Listening is active because it's engaging not just the auditory sense, but it's engaging the brain, the heart, the whole person. Because we get drawn in when we listen to what's being said. What would be the challenge to me? What would be the insight I might gain? What might be the opportunity that comes with participating with someone else? Now hearing is, you know oh, it's like having a dull prof. The information might be great, but the delivery is deadly and about a third of the way into the class the yawning, the nodding. That's passive. That's not engaging with the information. That's not engaging with one's classmates or with what's being presented.

So two quick stories about Benedict and humanity. They're a bit anecdotal, but it's how Benedictines can miss the point and how any of us can miss the point. How many have heard of St. Thomas? This is pretty anecdotal, St. Thomas Aquinas. Well he was a student at monastery in Italy, Montecassino. And you know we didn't think St. Thomas was smart enough so we threw him out of school and said go join the Dominicans.

Does the name O'Shaughnessy ring a bell? ***audience laughter*** How many? You must know this story. Well about a hundred years ago a person by the name of O'Shaughnessy was a student here. Well he got caught in the woods taken a little nip of whiskey and somebody in the community took umbrage and we threw him out. Well he went to the other network and built half their campus. They're still nipping in the woods here and we're paying for the buildings.

It's part of the humanity. It's part of our engagement with each other. It's part of how we encounter, for Christians, how we encounter Christ. When we want to engage with each other what's another way we can participate? Well you might not ever think of your employment as a vocation. And monks may not think of their vocation as an opportunity for employment. Let's talk about how any of us may have ended up here. If it's employment you were looking for a job. Reasonable, eating is a good thing paying for the food is a good thing. But what happens once you get here? You may not have anticipated what you might learn about yourself, spirituality, the gospel, Saint Benedict, the people that have become your friends.

How does that happen? Well it happens in situations just like this, in the work environment wherever you are engaged on campus. and you start talking and you start listening about this crazy book. This crazy edition of information called the Rule of Saint Benedict. Now this one's bound in red and if you're old enough the book of Mao was also printed and bound in red. Now let's look at what this talks about. It does not give an instruction on everyday life. Oh it says, it puts forth a few things to keep life calm in the monastery, but it doesn't tell us everything that we might need to know about how to live together. Some things for good order, some things for prayer, but it doesn't set out a methodology. St. Benedict had to start with Genesis as well. How do I get a group of people to live the life of the gospel and keep them from strangling each other or beating up on each other and living a life of prayer, work, and respect, and care for each other? So he set out and had a number of sources and put together the current edition of the Rule that we use.

But the rest comes from experience a person comes to the monastery and each monastery has its own personality, its own way of doing things, its own daily order, and customs. But how is it? That's not always printed. We can talk about a customary being printed, "In this house we do X Y and Z and not A B and C." The rest of it really comes from living with each other. The employment part of that is, as you get to know each other, it's working together. Working together from a base that says we might actually be able to support and care for each other and respect each other that reflects what St. Benedict has in the Rule, life together in community.

When you leave campus at the end a day, at the end of the day and you're heading home and if you're in the car alone, what is the first thing you do when you get in the car, grab the mobile device start checking emails, text messages, turn on the radio, listen to music? Most of us carry one of these our own all the time. It's called being connected. we're on the grid. oh isn't that exciting I can hardly wait until I can throw it. ***audience laughter*** Have you ever thought about not checking the email, the voicemail, or the text message? Wait for 10 minutes. You can start to drive home, or the next place you need to get to, but try it quietly for 10 minutes. Reflect on the day. Reflect on how you interacted with a colleague. Whether that person is in the monastery monks to monks, monks to each of you, you to any one of the monks. reflect on how that experience of the day touched you.

Employment, it's vocation, and not just employment. We are pulled into a way of living here that somehow, it's subtle. But it gets into your veins or under your fingernails or somehow into your heart. And then we can start asking, "Hmm would I be better or worse if I weren't working here and had the opportunity to better appreciate the Rule of Saint Benedict, how it's influencing my life?" More away from here than here which is even better because you take it with you. If you leave it at the entrance road that's not so good. That would mean none of us are learning anything. So an opportunity for silence. It doesn't take a lot of time I'm only talking ten minutes.

Have you ever picked up Scripture and turned to either the Gospels or the Psalms and picked a verse and just let the verse run around in your head? It's becoming more acquainted with faith life and it will affect how you work, where you work, and with whom you work. As we bump up against each other's humanity after a while a very good thing happens. We all have these edges, most of them are invisible. and those edges bump up against somebody else and their edges bump up against us. It's how the stones are polished. They're tumbled in a tumbler. Unless it's a really good diamond then you need a good cutter. But most stones are polished by being tumbled. And there's grit and other stones and they smooth themselves out and then they're polished. That's vocation, that's employment, that's part of experiencing life.

So vocation and employment our experiences of life that draw us out of ourselves. So if we listen actively, if we take a moment for silence, we can consider the tools of good works. I'm not gonna read those to you can go to the Rule, it's chapter 32. You can read about silence in chapter 42. And you can read about listening in the Prologue. But think of the tools of good works. What tools do we have? We have our person as the best tool we have to work with. We can choose goodness, or we can choose to be contrary to everything. There's nothing wrong with being happy and at peace. I have read nowhere in the Rule or in scripture that says you have to be unhappy. It's got to be drudgery. And if you're not somehow exhausted at the end of the day, you're not a person of faith. Well how sad is that? We're invited to have some sense of peace. We're invited to have some sense of our own goodness and the goodness of others. And there's nothing wrong with that occasional flash of happiness or joy in our life.

What will we allow in the workplace or in our vocation? Whether we're monastics or not. Think about your marriage, or don't think about your marriage. You know the person you married, is it the person you married? Or is it oh that's not the person I married after about the first week? I don't know this one. What happened to the other one? Well the same is true in the monastery. I didn't know, that's not the one we accepted what happened to that person? But it is employment and it's more importantly vocation and how we approach each other.

I'm open for some questions. That's enough I don't want to chatter all afternoon here. So any thoughts, comments? Was it worth the wait of 65 years ***audience laughter*** to hear that talk? I don't have 65 left. I maybe somebody else can do it better. But any thoughts or comments?

Yes, Hilary?

Hilary Thimmesh:

Mic, mic

Jonathan Licari:

Come here. There we go.

Hilary Thimmesh:

A cartoon in The New Yorker last year, spectacular. here's Adam sitting in his chair legs crossed with a beer in his hand watching TV. we see from the side here's this tree with the snake in it. here is a young woman holding out an apple to him and he's saying, "No thanks."
audience laughter

Jonathan Licari:

He's not giving up the beer and the television. it's a new twist on an old story that's great.
scanning the audience for more questions

Yes Cathy.

Cathy Wieme:

asking a question about changes Jonathan has seen since joining the monastery.

Jonathan Licari:

Yes, to life itself or to me? To the life itself in the monastery or to me personally? Because yes to both. I started just toward the end of an older system where monks or the young monks in the monasteries served tables and our every evening meal was a sit-down dinner and we carried trays and we swept hallways. and when I was, everybody has them "When I was a novice story," when wastewater treatment was being renovated about 30 plus years ago there are holding tanks down there and as the stuff is processed it goes into the holding tank. well as they had to renovate the plant, myself and one of my classmates, with fireman's boots up above our knees, you can only pump them out so far and then you have to shovel it into 50 gallon drums and pull it up out of the tank. they're not doing that now. ***audience laughter*** We used to refer to it as central receiving. ***audience laughter*** so things have changed. people have changed. how people grow up. what they're used to in their own home life. what they've experienced in their lives before coming here. so it's unique to each person. the community has to adapt in you know change oh that great big C word. Change. nobody likes it. but irrelevance is worse. if you don't change you become irrelevant. and so it's always moving

Cathy. it's always developing and we can go kicking and screaming, we can go with the beer in our hand watching television, or we can go with the plan to which we never get a printout. no one ever gets a printout of God's plan. but God is always saying, "Cooperate." "With what?" "The plan." it reveals itself as we live. that kind of answer your question? Okay. Any other thoughts? Yes?

Oh Viv, outside the door ***Jonathan pointing for her to leave outside the door***

audience laughter

Vivian Krueger:

How hard is it to go from living in the community here to living in a parish?

Jonathan Licari:

It depends on the person. It's a challenge. you get used to having everything provided. with people around all the time that you can talk with. and sometimes going out to a parish can be really painful. other times, depending on what jobs a person has had, it can be a temporary relief from the characters in the house. ***audience laughter*** So it's both. it's a good thing because the ministry is good. preaching the gospel is a wonderful thing. celebrating the sacraments is an absolute privilege. but it's a person's ability to adapt and to change and to say, "Nothing's forever." Okay? that kind of answered it? so it's painful and good simultaneously.

Looking around audience for more questions

Tom Stock:

Commenting that it is our attitude, for both employment and in the monastery, controlling our attitude in our ability to work with others and interact with others.

Jonathan Licari:

Yes, our attitude. And with attitude and you can throw in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John who invite us to change our attitude, without the happy hour that accompanies a lot of places at the end of the day. Call that attitude adjustment but it's gospel. it's the gospel life.

Jonathan looking through the audience for another question

Yes Colleen

Colleen Quinlivan:

I'm the one who's waited 65 years. ***audience laughter***

Jonathan Licari:

I hope you're not disappointed Colleen.

Colleen Quinlivan:

I am wondering if you could go a little bit from the listening standpoint to communication.

Jonathan Licari:

Okay, listening to communication. when okay taking it because listening, hearing is passive, listening is active. what do we take then from the listening and try to employ actively in our lives with each other? Taking what Tom said just a minute ago, are we willing to change our attitude and our outlook in our approach to anyone, ourselves or anyone else, that we come in contact with? Secondly, are we willing to accept the fact that people are putting up with us and that it's not us just putting up with them? that's active. can we say, can we bring ourselves to at least smile or acknowledge the presence of another person when we pass them in the hallway, when we encounter them at table, or are we trying to ignore them? it's all communication. can we say something that is, it doesn't have to be saccharine and complement, you know to the point of after you've complimented somebody they end up with diabetes because there was so much sugar in it. ***audience laughter*** But can we say something can we say something to somebody else that affirms their person? to recognize another person is to give them a quality of life. they already have it from God, but we're acknowledging that quality when we recognize them. does that help? Is that kind of down the path?

Colleen Quinlivan:

Yes, that is down the path.

Jonathan Licari:

But it won't change. Change is hard Colleen.

Colleen Quinlivan:

Oh really? ***audience laughter***

Jonathan Licari:

Okay any other thoughts? Comments? Questions? Well thank you. Thank you

applause

Rodger Narloch:

There we go. There we go. Thank you so much Father Jonathan and thank you all for taking a little bit of time out of your day to nourish yourselves both not only with the food but withal with also the message that Father Jonathan provided. Thank you for a good semester. My name is Roger Narloch. I'm the director of the Benedictine Institute and the sponsor of the Lunch and Learns as well as several other programs that I see a lot of familiar faces out in the

audience that have been taking part in Benedictine Institute events. We have a couple more this semester that I just want to alert you to and then of course we'll continue on with more events more Lunch and Learns and other kinds of things this spring as well. We have a couple more yet this this month. One of our programs is Building Community which again several of you have taken part of and it's just an opportunity to get to know one another, to listen to what other people have to say, and to affirm them. And but it's purely social there's no program to it. That last one of these is going to be of this semester is going to be this Friday at 3:45 to 5:00 in Simon's Hall and there will be wine and cheese and some other good food. So, I hope to see you there. And then we also have Lectio in the Library which is a program that we started this fall and our last one of those for this semester is going to be this coming Monday from 8:30 to about 9:05 or so and that's over in the Learning Commons. So, you'll see signs for that as well. So, with that, enjoy the rest of the day, stay warm, don't get blown away, and have a great holiday season.

applause